

Character Builder 您好嗎？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about Buddha's Birthday

拜

Putonghua pronunciation: *bai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *baai3*

Meanings: respectful gesture, worship

Gesture 拜 means cupping hands, raising then lowering lower arms towards someone to show respect. Junior 拜見 (*bai4 jian4* = show-respect~see = pays courtesy visit to) senior. Good friends 結拜 (*jie2 bai4* = knot-show-respect = swear oath, become sworn brothers).

Materialists 拜金 (*bai4 jin1* = worship-gold = are money-minded). 拜火教 (*bai4 huo3 jiao4* = worship-fire~teaching/religion) = Zoroastrianism. 拜祖先 (*bai4 zu3 xian1* = show-respect-ancestor-previous = ancestor worship), 拜年 (*bai4 nian2* = show-respect~year = visiting relatives/friends at Chinese New Year time) are traditional Chinese customs.

Buddhists 拜佛 (*bai4 fo2* = worship~Buddha), say “阿彌陀佛!” (*a1 mi2 tuo2 fo2* = “Amitabha”-transliterated, Buddha's name) much like Christians say “阿門!” (*a1 men2* = “Amen”-transliterated), meaning “Bless you!”

by Diana Yue